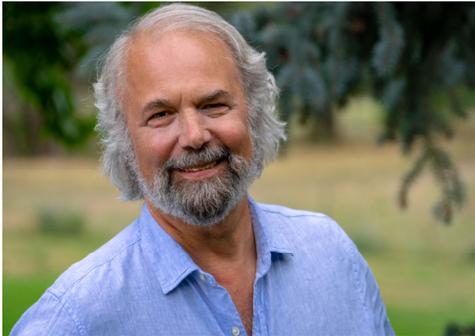


RECEIVING THE SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

PULSE OF SPIRIT
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DAVID KARCHERE is a speaker and workshop leader who assists people to renew their Primal Spirituality—an experience that virtually all human beings know at birth, and that ideally grows as they mature.

Sometimes, it is hard to find the truth of a historical figure and the truth of what they brought to the world. It can be so shrouded in other people's reactions and what they thought of them that you can hardly see past all that to appreciate the person themselves.

This is certainly true of Jesus of Nazareth. On Christmas Eve, I visited a church in Fort Collins. I sat in the pew, enjoying the people and the music, looking up at the large statue of a limp body on a cross. I respect how much that symbol means to millions of people. But to me, the image says more about the people who perpetrated that terrible act than it does about the man himself.

How he faced that excruciating experience is beyond remarkable. Still, there is so much more to remember him by. And for me, he didn't have to endure that to prove who he was and bring his gift to the world.

How can we liberate this man from the way human culture has attempted to possess him as their own?

How can we see him for who he was and receive his gift?

Jesus was born as a Jewish man into a Jewish culture. But not many people would think he was defined by or limited to that culture.

He was crucified by the Roman Empire, who persecuted his followers for two and a half centuries and then, a half-century later, adopted their version of him and his teaching as their state religion. Soon after, the cross became an important symbol for the Roman Catholic Church. In the 6th century, the Church began to display crucifixes—a cross with the body of Jesus upon it.

Was Jesus' significance defined by the Roman Empire who crucified him, or by the state religion they established, which glorified their crucifixion of him? I am aware of the story told about the significance of the crucifixion. And still, it is hard to get over the horror of the deed itself.

There have been Christian denominations and Christian leaders through the ages who have attempted to recover the true meaning and significance of Jesus' life. Like Martin Luther, many protested the dominating practice of the Church. Others attempted to understand Jesus through the words of people who claimed to follow him, especially the Apostle Paul.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, thought leaders like Mary Baker Eddy, Ernest Holmes, and Emanuel Swedenborg brought new philosophies that included a new vision of Jesus. In 1976, Helen Schucman published *A Course in Miracles*, a channeled representation of Jesus' teachings.

No matter how much people have tried, it has been a challenge for humankind to cast off all the conflicting assertions about Jesus to truly receive who he was and is and to understand his teachings. It has been hard to liberate him from the attempts of people throughout history to confine him in the cage of their own culture, religious institution, doctrine, or philosophy.

Jesus was not bringing his message only for the Jewish world. His teaching was not only for the Christian world as it emerged after he left. He wasn't a leader from Western Civilization, for Western Civilization.

As the Christmas angel proclaims, he brought great joy which was for *all* people. Who he was and what he taught affirmed the truth of all people.

The way Christianity has presented the significance of Jesus' life and message, it seems Jesus is the protagonist in the story. Here is another possibility. *It is a story of us. Humankind is the protagonist of the story.* So, if you think of the story as not being about what *he* did but about what *we* did or about what we do or don't do, the protagonist of the

story is us. The story looks different from that perspective.

From a more traditional Christian perspective, it's all about Jesus' special nature as the Son of God and how he died on the cross to save us from our sins. That makes the story all about him. But if he expressed and embodied Deity on earth—and that is what the story tells us—then why is what *he* did surprising? God does what God does, in this case, in human form. That is not the variable in the story. It is the constant. The variable is how people responded to him.

Jesus himself came to terms with this before the commencement of his public ministry. This is portrayed in the story of the *Temptations in the Wilderness*:

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.

And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.
Matthew 4:1-4

Prove yourself. But Jesus had nothing to prove.

There are many messages you could take from this passage. One of them is that Jesus refused to believe that his ministry was a test of his divinity. It wasn't up to him whether the inert experience of human beings would come to life—become bread. His role was simply to be open to what came to him from the Divine Source—from the mouth of God.

His answer to all three temptations confirmed that he was who he was, unchanged by the circumstances in which he found himself. He had nothing to prove other than to be true to himself, which he was. This set him up to bring divine action into his world. And that gave the people of his world a choice in how they would respond.

This is a way to look at the rest of the gospel story. It is a story of what people did as Jesus opened himself to what came from the mouth of God. Humanity is the protagonist of the story. The story looks dramatically different from the common view of it when seen from that perspective.

Jesus is, perhaps, the greatest spiritual teacher who ever lived. In his lifetime, the people around him applauded who he was and what he brought to the world—certainly not always, and not always with clear vision. Ever since he was present in the world, that applause has continued and multiplied. People have seen him as the protagonist of the story. He has been acknowledged, honored, and even worshipped.

Put yourself in the position of a teacher of a high-level course in spirituality. It is halfway through the semester. You have a student who hasn't done a lick of homework and isn't passing the tests you administer. In the middle of a class, the student stands up and praises you. They tell you what a great person you are and what a great job you are doing as a teacher. *You're amazing! You're a genius! You must be enlightened! You're a gift from God!* They start to clap and urge everyone else in the class to stand up and applaud with them.

How would you feel about this as that teacher?

The student, in this case, has failed to appreciate that the hero of his educational journey is not you, the teacher. It is himself. From that perspective, the

significance of the course experience takes on an entirely different meaning.

Here Jesus was, a spiritual teacher, in the position of bringing something to people that could change them. Isn't that what a teacher does? A teacher comes to teach so that people may learn. Ultimately, particularly for spiritual teaching, what's being brought is an opportunity for metanoia—a change of heart and mind, transformation. He came to bring the opportunity for that. And people have been applauding ever since.

What Jesus brought couldn't have much impact if people didn't applaud—if they didn't honor what he brought. But metanoia—a change of heart and mind—doesn't happen for a person if all they do is applaud the teacher. They have to receive the teaching and let it change them.

Great job, Jesus! Great job! But are we doing our homework?

Consider the challenge facing Jesus as a spiritual teacher. By the very nature of what he was doing, he was presenting something ineffable, something invisible, which people had not experienced.

The potential of a human is invisible until it is realized. You can't see the power of Love inside a person until they let it out. You can't see God with only 20/20 vision. It takes a pure heart to see a reality that is invisible to most people.

This is one of the most significant issues in learning what Jesus taught. It is hard to name the invisible realities within a person without using a mental idea that is of a physical reality. But Jesus' teaching was not about physical reality. Physical reality became a parable for something spiritual.

Heaven is a spiritual thing. You might think of it as a physical place, perhaps up in the sky. Maybe you go to that physical place after you die. It has clouds and angels with harps. But the heaven he spoke of is not a physical place. It is a spiritual reality that is *like* a physical place.

God is not your dad, and he is not an old guy with a beard up in the sky. The word refers to the invisible presence of Being within the visible. If you think Jesus was speaking about a physical reality, how do you make sense of this statement he made, speaking of God, the Father:

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one;

That is a physical impossibility. But it *is* a spiritual reality that can be known.

Jesus taught this spiritual reality. But was it heard, received, and understood? And then, did people do their homework? Much of Christian tradition was authored by people who didn't do their homework, or at least not enough to allow what Jesus brought to enter them fully and be expressed and embodied fully by them in the world.

As a reader of this article, it is highly likely that you have encountered a spiritual experience of some kind. Almost half the people in America say they

have had a sudden feeling of connection with something beyond this world. Here is the question: *What do we do then?*

If we have an experience like that, it's on us. We're the protagonist here. What are we going to do? Just the fact that somebody came along and inspired us or that we had a spiritual experience is not what, in the end, tells the tale. What tells the tale is our metanoia—our change. Do we let in what we have touched? Do we let it penetrate us and change us? This is a life-long project. This is doing our homework. And if the spiritual penetrates our humanity and changes us, we can share it with the world.

We can't go back in time to learn from Jesus' physical presence and teaching. But if we free ourselves of other people's restricting ideas about him, we can tune into who he was. We can receive his liberating teaching, expressed through the red-letter words of the gospels. And then, perhaps, we can tune into the spirit of this man who embodied the Supreme Soul of our Soul Family. We can know ourselves as a member of the Soul Family for this Planet Earth.

David Karchere
dkarchere@emnet.org
Sunrise Ranch
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